

Questions About The Holy Eucharist

Questions addressed to a Catholic Priest. From “Radio Replies”.

By Rev Dr Leslie Rumble, M.S.C.

Catholic Truth Society of Oregon No.apol151 (1950)

Q. What is the Holy Eucharist? I hear Catholics speak of it, but what do they mean?

It is a Sacrament instituted by Christ, in which Christ Himself is truly, really, and substantially present, that He may be offered in the Holy Mass as the Sacrifice of the New Law, and also that He may be received by us in Holy Communion for the spiritual refreshment of our souls.

Q. Here is a difficulty for me to believe what you Catholics say: Are there any signs in the Host proving that He is bodily present?

No. It is a mystery of faith. All external appearances remain as before consecration, but the substance of bread and the substance of wine are changed into the substance of Our Lord's body and blood. The reason why we believe is not in the Host as such, but in God. He has revealed this truth, and we believe because He must know and could not tell an untruth.

Q. Did not the Jews think that they were asked to eat the very body of Christ? Yet He refuted them by saying that His body would ascend to Heaven and that the flesh profits nothing. John 6:63-64.

When Christ promised that He would give His very flesh to eat, the Jews protested because they imagined a natural and cannibalistic eating of Christ's body. Christ refuted this notion of the manner in which His flesh was to be received by saying that He would ascend into Heaven, not leaving His body in its human form upon earth. But He did not say that they were not to eat His actual body. He would thus contradict Himself, for a little earlier He had said, "My flesh is meat indeed and My blood is drink indeed." John 6:56. He meant, therefore, "You will not be asked to eat My flesh in the horrible and natural way you think, for My body as you see it with your eyes will be gone from this earth. Yet I shall leave My flesh and blood in another and supernatural way which your natural and carnal minds cannot understand. The carnal or fleshly judgment profits nothing. I ask you therefore to have faith in Me and to trust Me. It is the spirit of faith which will enable you to believe, not your natural judgment." Then the Gospel goes on to say that many would not believe, and walked no more with Him; just as many to-day will not believe, and walk no more with the Catholic Church. According to the doctrine of the Catholic Church Christ's body is ascended into Heaven. But by its substance, independently of all the laws of space, which affect substance through accidental qualities, this body is present in every consecrated Host.

Q. We Protestants believe that Christ's body is really present in the Eucharist, but not by transubstantiation.

The majority of Protestants believe that His body is really absent. Those who do say that they believe in His real Presence yet deny transubstantiation illogically admit an effect yet deny the only

process by which it can truly occur. If there be no transubstantiation or conversion of the substance of bread into the substance of Christ's body, then the substance of bread remains after consecration, and it is bread and not the body of Christ. People make a kind of bogey of transubstantiation as foolishly as a man would do somewhat similarly if he admitted a railway from New York to San Francisco, yet refused to admit that it could be called the transcontinental railway.

Q. The Apostles' Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Nicene Creed do not mention transubstantiation. There is no record of such a doctrine until 1564 when Pius IV put it into his creed. Are we to believe the early Christians, or the doctrine of a thousand years later?

The doctrine is not in the three Creeds you mention. But they do not contain the whole of Christian doctrine. They are partial statements insisting upon certain doctrines against special errors of those times. It is true that Pius IV included the doctrine in his profession of faith, but you are wrong when you say that there was no mention of the doctrine till then. In 1551, 13 years earlier, the Council of Trent taught the doctrine explicitly. In 1274, 290 years earlier, the 2nd Council of Lyons insisted upon the admission of transubstantiation by the Greeks as a condition of return to the Catholic Church. In 1215, 349 years earlier, the 4th Lateran Council consecrated the word transubstantiation as expressing correctly the Christian doctrine of Christ's real presence by conversion of the substance of bread into the substance of His body.

In 1079, 500 years earlier, Berengarius declared in his retraction, "I acknowledge that the bread is substantially changed into the substance of Christ's body." Everybody who possessed the true Christian faith, until this year, 1079, believed in the substantial change, and there was no need to insist upon the word, since no one denied the nature of the change. In the 4th century, all the great Fathers and writers admitted that by consecration, bread was changed into Our Lord's very body. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, who died about 107 A.D., wrote, "Heretics abstain from the Eucharist because they do not confess the Eucharist to be that very flesh of Jesus Christ which suffered for us." And that doctrine is all that is expressed by transubstantiation.

At the Last Supper Christ said, "This is my body which is given for you." Luke 22:19. Now He either gave them His body or He did not. But He gave them His Body, for we dare not say, "Lord although you say, 'This is my body,' it is certainly not your body." However, it was not His body according to appearances and visible qualities, and it could have been His body only according to substance. Therefore, Our Lord first taught this doctrine of substantial change at least implicitly.

Q. The elements do not change, for there is no chemical difference after consecration.

Which elements do not change? In every material thing, there are two sets of elements quite distinct — substance and qualities. And no man has ever seen substance; he has seen qualities only. Thus, I see the squareness of a block of iron, but it can become round, still remaining iron. I can feel its hardness, though it can become soft in the furnace, the substance being unchanged. If it be black, it can become red; if it be cold, it can become hot; if it be heavy, by great heat, I can render it a vapor. The qualities, then, differ from the substance, or we could not change one without changing the other. And if we can change qualities without changing substance, God can certainly change substance without changing qualities. Any chemical differences are dependent upon qualities. Granted the permanence of the same accidental qualities the same chemical reactions will be apparent.

Father Frederick Faber, whilst yet an Anglican, well said, "I am worried about the Roman doctrine because, whatever may be said of the proofs for it, I do not see how any man can disprove it. If they

say that the substance changes, but that all appearances remain the same, then they say that something changes of which no man has any experience and yet which reason must postulate as the reality underlying all appearances and separate from them." When you say that the elements do not change their chemical properties, I simply reply that the elements of external qualities do not change their chemical properties, and that no Catholic has ever imagined that they do. But the substance underlying those external appearances certainly does change. The fact that qualities remain unaltered is a fact of experience; the fact that the substance changes is revealed by God, and cannot be known in any other way. Yet is it not more than sufficiently guaranteed when God says so?

Q. We have only the word of the Priest for the fact.

No Catholic Priest would himself believe it were it not the doctrine of Christ. It would be the height of folly to believe it without solid evidence that Christ had taught it. God created substance and qualities, and we cannot deny to Him perfect control over them and ability to change them at His pleasure. And when Christ says, "This is My body," we have to accuse Him of falsehood or else admit that it is His body not according to the senses, but according to the underlying substance which is imperceptible to the senses.

Q. Is Christ's body anatomically and physiologically present?

Christ's real body is present. Anatomical structure and physiological modifications belong to qualities possessed by substance. After the consecration, we have the substance of Christ's body present without any external manifestation of His anatomical or physiological appearances, and the qualities of bread remaining as the object of sense perception without any substance of bread. That substance of bread has been converted into the substance of Christ's body. And as substance is the basic reality, we rightly say that the Blessed Sacrament is the very body of Christ.

Q. Is Christ's body subject to processes of digestion?

The substance of Christ's body is not subject to processes of digestion or to any chemical reactions. The qualities of bread of course behave in their normal way, undergoing a change as they are affected by digestion. Our Lord's substantial presence ceases as these qualities cease to retain those characteristics proper to bread.

Q. If poison were present before consecration, would it be safe to consume the Eucharist?

No. People would be poisoned. The Church has never taught that poison could be converted into Christ's body, and in any case, you are dealing with chemical activities proper to qualities, and not proper to substance as such. All such objections are based upon notions excluded by Catholic teaching. And it is of little use to refute what the Catholic Church does not teach.

Q. Christ is in Heaven. How can you put Him in the tabernacle?

No Catholic denies that Christ is continually present in Heaven. He is not so present in the Eucharist that He ceases to be present in Heaven. He is in Heaven according to His natural though glorified form. The same Christ is in the Eucharist substantially, but not in the same way as He is present in Heaven. Substance as such abstracts from limitations of place and space. Locality directly belongs to the qualities of bread, which remain after consecration, and indirectly only to the substantial presence of Christ's body underlying those apparent qualities.

Q. Is not the Priest who can accomplish this thing akin to the miracle man of primitive religions?

No. The miracle-man claimed to perform his wonders by his own marvelous powers. The Priest says that the power of Christ effects the change in the Eucharist, and that he himself is but an instrument employed by Christ, and taking a very secondary place. The miracle-man depended upon the superstition and credulity of the bystanders. The Priest forbids superstition and credulity, and insists upon faith in God, a supernatural faith based upon rational foundations. The miracle-man attributed preternatural effects to natural causes, whether spiritual or material. The Catholic Church attributes supernatural effects (a vast difference!) to a supernatural cause. The miracle-man could never prove any direct commission from God. The Catholic Church can prove her direct commission from Him to the satisfaction of every intelligent man willing to inquire into her credentials with sincerity. The miracle-man tried to perform things wholly unbecoming to God, by means which have no resemblance to those relied upon by the Catholic Church, and for a purpose and end totally different.

(Father Rumble is himself a convert to the Catholic faith and is ideally placed to answer questions from non-Catholics about the Catholic Faith,)
